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SUBJECT: MICHEL PONIATOWSKI STEPS DOWN FROM RI PRESIDENT-
CY

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SUMMARY. MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR MICHEL PONIATOWSKI RELINQUISHED THE PRESIDENCY OF THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY (IR) DECEMBER 17. HE WILL BE REPLACED BY A COLLEGIAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE HEADED BY SECRETARY GENERAL AND RI DEPUTY JACQUES DOMINATI. ON LEAVING THE PRESIDENCY PONIATOWSKI CALLED FOR THE FORMATION OF A "FEDERATION OF CENTRISTS" WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. END SUMMARY.

1. AS EXPECTED , MICHEL PONIATOWSKI HAS STEPPED DOWN FORM HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY. THE OCCASION WAS A MEETING OF THE RI NATIONAL COMMITTEE IN PARIS DECEMBER 16-17. WITH HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE PRESIDENCY, THE PARTY WILL BE LED BY A COORDINATING COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF RI SECRETARY GENERAL JACQUES DOMINATI AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND YOUTH MOVEMENT. PONIATOWSKI, HIMSELF, WAS GIVEN THE TITLE OF "FIRST PARTY MILITANT."

2. IN HIS FINAL SPEECH AS RI PRESIDENT, PONIATOWSKI AFFIRMED THAT "NOW MORE THAN EVER" THE RI IS THE "DRIVING FORCE" OF THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. HE THEN DUSTED OFF HIS LONG-CHERISHED CONCEPT OF A "FEDERATION OF CENTERISTS" BUILT AROUND THE RI WHICH, IN HIS VIEW, WOULD REFLECT THE ACTUAL SPECTRUM OF PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT EXTENDING "FROM THE CENTER LEFT TO THE CENTER RIGHT."

3. ELABORATING ON PONIATOWSKI'S THEME, JACQUES DOMINATI TOLD THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE RI, THE FEDERATION WOULD INCLUDE CENTER DEMOCRATS, RADICAL SOCIALISTS AND OTHER CENTER FORMATIONS WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. THUS, FOR DOMINATI, THE FEDERATION WOULD ENSURE THAT CENTRIST POSITIONS WHICH ENJOY MAJORITY SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE NATION WOULD BE ACCORDED SIMILAR STATUS WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL COALITION.

4. COMMENT: PONIATOWSKI OF COURSE HAD PLEDGED TO GIVE UP THE PRESIDENCY WHEN HE WAS ELECTED TO THE POSITION IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FEBRUARY 1975. GIVEN HIS CONTINUED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT GISCARD AND HIS TIES WITH MEMBERS OF THE NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, HIS ULTIMATE CONTROL OVER THE PARTY WILL REMAIN UNAFFECTED BY THIS CHANGE IN TITLES. HIS CALL FOR A "FEDERATION OF CENTRISTS" UNDOUBTEDLY STEMS FROM PRESIDENT GISCARD'S RECENT PLEDGE "TO GOVERN FORM THE CENTER" (REFTEL). SIMILARLY, IT MAY ALSO REFLECT THE PRESIDENT'S LONG-RUMORED HOPE OF EVENTUALLY

WIDENING HIS MAJORITY TO ENCOMPASS ELEMENTS OF THE
MORE MODERATE LEFT.

5. THE RI REPORTEDLY HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO SOUND OUT
RADICAL SOCIALISTS AND OTHER CENTRIST FORMATIONS ON
THE FEDERATION CONCEPT. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT THE IDEA
WILL MEET WITH MUCH ENTHUSIASM. THE RI IS GENERALLY
CONSIDERED AS THE MOST CONSERVATIVE ELEMENT IN THE
PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY AND IT WILL TAKE SOME DOING TO
CONVINCE CENTRISTS TO JOIN WITH IT IN SUCH AN UNDER-
TAKING. MOREOVER, PONIATOWSKI'S PROPOSAL IS CERTAIN TO
REKINDLE FEARS THAT LONG-RUN RI AIMS INCLUDE POACHING
FROM CENTER PARTY ELECTORAL PRESERVES. SIMILARLY, WHILE
WE HAVE SEEN NO REACTION FROM THE GAULLISTS (UDR),
PONIATOWSKI'S REMARKS, INGNORING THE UDR ENTIRLY AND
AGAIN TERMING THE RI THE FIRST PARTY OF THE MOJORITY,
SEEM CERTAIN TO RAISE SUSPICIONS ON THAT QUARTER AS
WELL.

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